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# Capacity Marks on OLD ENGLISH PEWTER MEASURES

By RONALD F. MICHAELIS

IN almost every branch of collecting certain apparently inexplicable factors arise to puzzle students; some remain mysteries and others bring forth suggestions or theories to account for their existence. No less is this the case among connoisseurs of English pewter.

For some considerable time I have been unsatisfied by the smug acceptance by some collectors of the meaning of certain punched markings which appear either on the lids or, more frequently, upon the lips of some English pewter baluster-shaped wine measures.

We have little knowledge of the shapes and styles of pewter measures in the 15th century or earlier, but we have, in the records of the Worshipful Company of Pew-

terers of London, mention of measures of one sort or another from 1351 onwards, and in 1483<sup>1</sup> is given a list of measures by various titles, including:—

NORMANDY POTTS : Pottell ( $\frac{1}{2}$ -gallon),  
Quarte, and Peingte.

HOUSEHOLD POTTS : Pottell, Quarte,  
and Peingte.

MEASURE POTTS : Gallon, Pottell, Quarte,  
Peingte, and Half peingte.

As yet we have no indication of the form or style of any of these types.

The earliest pewter measures which have come to light (and which we can be sure are

English) are what we know as baluster measures.

No one has been able to say with certainty that these were made prior to the end of the 16th century, but some writers have believed them to date, at least, from the time of Henry VIII. This dating has been suggested by the form of a capacity verification mark, or "seal", impressed upon the cover or elsewhere

on some early pewter measures. This is said to be the mark indicating that the capacity has been checked and found to conform to the standard laid down by Henry VIII.

The mark in question is a Crown, beneath which are the letters "h.R.", as shown in Fig. 1 (A) and (B) here-with.

That this mark originated as suggested is purely conjectural—there being no reliable evidence to prove the point. It can be said, however, that although it has been found on some of our earliest measures, which may well date from the 16th century, it is also found on measures which are unquestionably of much later date.

So far as I can trace this hare was started by the late H. J. L. J. Massé, when he produced his Catalogue of the Pewter Exhibition at Clifford's Inn Hall, in 1908, in which he shows an illustration (on page 11) of the cover of an English pewter  $\frac{1}{2}$ -pint baluster measure, with "bud" thumb-piece, bearing "housemarks" of its owner, and he states that, on the rim,

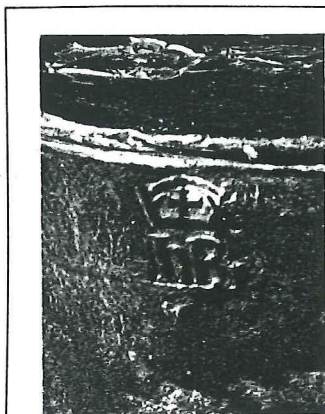


Fig. 1A. The "seal" which is struck on the lip of an early 17th century baluster measure.

(By courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum.)



Fig. 1B. Verification seal on lip of the measure shown in Fig. 2.

1. Charles Welch, *History of the Worshipful Company of Pewterers of London*, Vol. 1, page 57.



Fig. 2.  $\frac{1}{2}$ -pint baluster measure with "bud" thumb-piece, by Nicholas Marriott, London. circa 1690-1700.

is a Crowned "h.R.", of which he gives a drawing.

In his description of the piece he declares it to be a "Measure, temp. Henry VIII, 1514". This dating is perpetuated in his *Chats on Old Pewter* (page 153), published in 1911.

At that time the measure was in the collection of Mr. C. F. C. Buckmaster and it was, presumably, in uncleaned state, but when this later came into the possession of Mr. R. W. Cooper, of Nottingham—a discerning collector who carefully cleaned off the deposit of black oxide upon its surface—it was found to bear a maker's mark upon the rim, in addition to the "seal".

The maker's touch is that shown in H. H.

Cotterell's book *Old Pewter, its Makers and Marks*, No. 5787, and is struck on the London Pewterers' touchplate, No. 435. The touch bears the initials "N.M." and the date 1687 in a small beaded circle.

In 1908 little was known of the ownership of many of the touchplate marks, but much research has been done since that date by the late H. H. Cotterell and others, and it may now be stated that the mark was struck by one Nicholas Marriott, a pewterer of London, who was made "free" on December 16, 1686, and who "opened shop" and struck his touch on February 3, 1687.

This measure has been newly photographed, and is shown again in Fig. 2. The Crowned "h.R." mark may be clearly seen upon the lip. In the writer's collection is a quart measure, by the same maker, also bearing this identical "seal".

In the reign of Henry VIII one of the regulations of the Royal Household (Cap. 20) was:—

"Officers of the Squillery (scullery) to see that all vessels, as well silver as pewter, be kept and saved from stealing."<sup>2</sup>

How better than by the impression of a mark such as that described?

But, however likely this might seem at first glance—particularly when it appears on very early

measures—no support can be given to the theory that the Crowned "h.R." denotes Royal property. The mark turns up too frequently on purely tavern pieces—their ownership only too strongly proven by the addition of "housemarks" and initials of the former owner and his wife. Both these features can be clearly seen in Mr. Cooper's measure.

Royal property is known to have been marked in other ways to establish ownership—a good example is shown in Fig. 3, which illustrates a fine  $\frac{1}{2}$ -pint baluster measure of the same type as that just described, in the collection of Capt. A. V. Sutherland Graeme of London. This bears the engraved inscription

2. H. J. L. J. Massé, *Pewter Plate*, 2nd edition, 1910, p. 70.

“ His Majesty’s Warehouse in Woodbridge ”, together with the Crowned monogram “ G.R ” and, upon the cover, a finely engraved replica of the “ broad arrow ”.

It bears, also on the rim, a somewhat different representation of the Crowned “ H.R ” mark—this time with a capital letter “ H ”—both letters flanking a sword of the type which appears in the first quarter of the shield of the Arms of the City of London (see drawing at the end of this article). This mark is on the lip on the far side away from the camera and does not, therefore, appear in the photograph. In close proximity to it is the maker’s touch (No. 110 on the touchplates), which bears the initials “ T.S ” and the date (16)68, and is possibly that of Thomas Stribblehill of London, who became “ free ” in 1668. The measure itself can be dated as of *circa* 1715.

Further examples of marked Royal pewter include a pair of plates at Hampton Court, stamped on the rim with the crowned Tudor rose and the initials “ E.R ” (for Elizabeth Regina) ; and several plates of the Georges with both punched and engraved cyphers, are known to exist.

It should be stated here that “ bud ” type baluster measures were not made until towards the close of the 17th century and, secondly, that the types of thumb-pieces used upon earlier measures would have been of either “ wedge ”, “ ball and wedge ” or “ hammerhead ” formation.

The first two of these may well have been made in the time of Henry VIII or Elizabeth I, but we have no specimen which can be so dated with certainty.

There is every reason to believe that the use of *pewter* measures was not universal in the time of Henry VIII, for during the whole of the 16th century the Pewterers’ Company records abound with entries relating to the lidding of earthenware pots and measures with pewter covers, and by the beginning of the 17th century the importation and use of such vessels for tavern purposes was reaching alarming

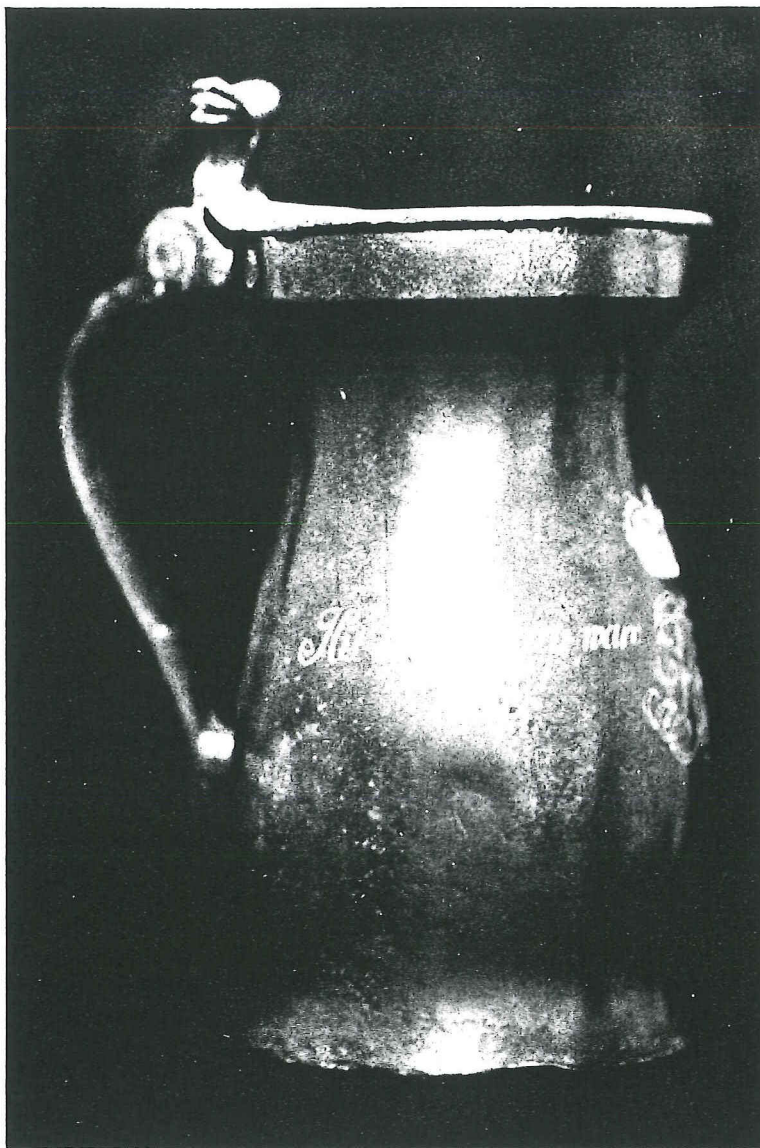


Fig. 3.  $\frac{1}{4}$ -pint baluster measure, with inscription “ His Majesty’s Warehouse in Woodbridge ”, *circa* 1715.

proportions, so far as the pewterers were concerned. So much so, that in 1632 the Pewterers’ Court moved that a petition should be preferred to His Majesty’s Council to the effect that “ no victuallers or others should sell any beere or ale but in pewter potts ”.<sup>3</sup>

It is not apparent whether this petition was actually preferred, nor of the outcome, but the pewterers did not allow the matter to rest, for in 1649 a further petition was drawn up—Item 3 reading :—

“ That all measures for liquid Commodities may be mad of such mettle or stuffe as will take the faire impression of a seall.”<sup>4</sup>

This is the first mention I can find in the

3. Welch, *op. cit.*, Vol. 2, p. 90.

4. Welch, *op. cit.*, Vol. 2, p. 113.

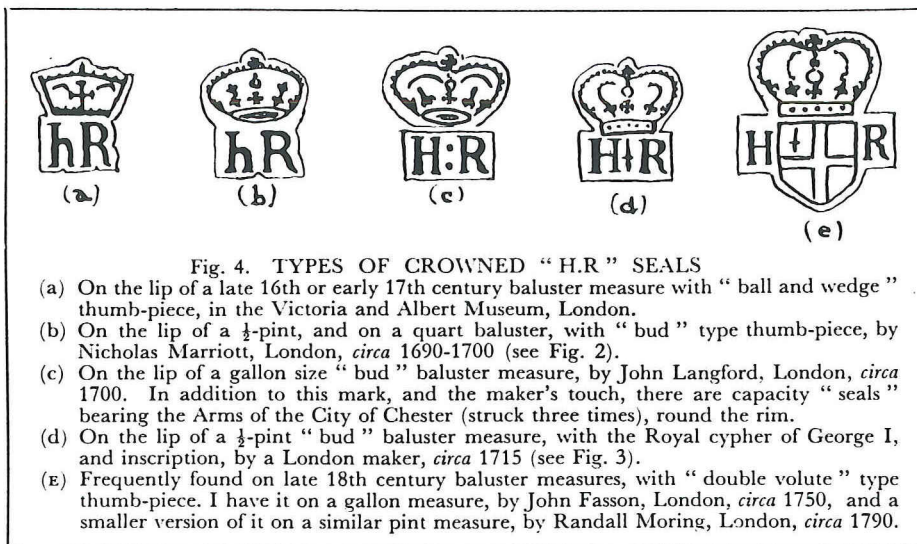


Fig. 4. TYPES OF CROWNED "H.R." SEALS

- (a) On the lip of a late 16th or early 17th century baluster measure with "ball and wedge" thumb-piece, in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.
- (b) On the lip of a ½-pint, and on a quart baluster, with "bud" type thumb-piece, by Nicholas Marriott, London, *circa* 1690-1700 (see Fig. 2).
- (c) On the lip of a gallon size "bud" baluster measure, by John Langford, London, *circa* 1700. In addition to this mark, and the maker's touch, there are capacity "seals" bearing the Arms of the City of Chester (struck three times), round the rim.
- (d) On the lip of a ½-pint "bud" baluster measure, with the Royal cypher of George I, and inscription, by a London maker, *circa* 1715 (see Fig. 3).
- (e) Frequently found on late 18th century baluster measures, with "double volute" type thumb-piece. I have it on a gallon measure, by John Fasson, London, *circa* 1750, and a smaller version of it on a similar pint measure, by Randall Moring, London, *circa* 1790.

Pewterers' Company records relating to the "sealing" of measures and, in my opinion, the "seal" to which reference is made is, in fact, a mark certifying capacity, and is most probably that with the "h.R" crowned which I have already described. The mark is certainly more frequently found on measures which one is more inclined to date as of the 17th than of the 16th century. In fact, a variation of the mark, with capital letters "H.R" flanking the Arms of the City of London, is found on measures dating up to the end of the 18th century.

In 1696, following a petition from the Tin Farmers of Cornwall, a resolution was made by the Committee of the House of Commons

"That for encouraging the consumption of Tin, and advancing the price thereof, no wine, beere, ale, brandy, rum or other spirits be sold by retail in any Tavern or other public house but in sealed measures made of pewter."<sup>5</sup> (The italics are mine—R.F.M.)

In 1702 the Pewterers' Court was informed of "a greate increase of Muggs made of Earth and a Mark impressed thereon in imitation of Sealed measures to sell liquid commodities in",<sup>6</sup> and again, in 1708, at a Court meeting on December 15, one

"Mr. Wroth, Clerk of the Markett of the Queen's Household, declared that the principall Potters who make Muggs lived within his jurisdiction, and that their muggs, though sealed, were not of full (at least, of uncertain) measure."<sup>7</sup>

The reference to "the Clerk of the Queen's Household" is, I think, the clue which explains the "h.R" mark, about which there has been so much controversy. Could this not

be intended to represent "household Rex (or Regina)" and thus be the mark used by the Clerk of the Markets of the Royal Household to denote that the capacity has been checked by him?

According to Mr. Harold Speight, the chief Inspector of Weights and Measures in Newcastle-

on-Tyne,<sup>8</sup> there was no general obligation upon Local Authorities to provide for the inspection and marking of weights and measures until early in the 19th century, although the practice of stamping measures as a guarantee of accuracy of content seems to have been inaugurated in the reign of Edward I, who ordained that

"The Standard of bushels, gallons, and ells shall be sealed with an iron seal of Our Lord the King, and no measure shall be in any town unless it do agree with the King's measure."

We know that in Scotland it came within the province of the Dean of Guild to check not only the capacity but the quality of the work, and he was provided (in Dundee, at any rate) with "ane Iron stamp to mark ye tin stoupes", and (in 1614) the Guildry Incorporation records of Dundee specifically state that no-one should hereafter have any unstamped stoupes in their house or taverns under pain of a fine of ten pounds.<sup>9</sup>

It would seem that London was more diligent in its capacity checks than were other towns of England or Scotland, for we find these verification seals on so many baluster measures which have a definite link with the capital, by virtue of either having been dug up in the city, or by bearing tavern "housemarks" which are traceable to known sites. In addition, there are the Crowned "H.R" marks with either the London City Arms, or St. Paul's dagger incorporated therein.

I have sketched the various types of Crowned "H.R" seals known to me, and give these herewith, together with details of the measures upon which they have been found.

5. Welch, *op. cit.*, Vol. 2, p. 168. 6. Welch, *op. cit.*, Vol. 2, p. 173.  
7. Welch, *op. cit.*, Vol. 2, p. 176.

8. *Verification Marks on Old Pewter Measures*, in *ANTIQUARY COLLECTOR*, December, 1938, pp. 317-19.

9. L. Ingleby Wood, *Scottish Pewterware and Pewterers*, p. 156.